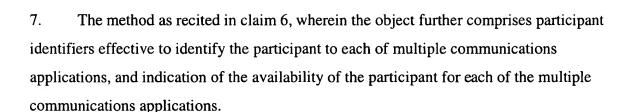
WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of establishing a computer-based communications session involving a user of a computer, said method comprising:

determining the availability of a potential participant in the communications session; and

according to the determined availability, displaying information on a display screen of the computer.

- 2. The method as recited in claim 1, wherein said determining comprises retrieving availability information for the participant from a data structure.
- 3. The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the data structure is stored on an additional computer.
- 4. The method as recited in claim 1, wherein said displaying comprises displaying, for a given participant, availability for each of multiple communications applications.
- 5. The method as recited in claim 1, wherein said displaying comprises displaying, for a given communications application, a list of participants available for a communications session using the communications application.
- 6. The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the availability information for the participant is within an object in an object-based programming approach.



- 8. The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising:
 - receiving from the user notification of a desired communications application to be used for the communications session; and
 - if the potential participant is available using the desired communications application, retrieving a participant identifier effective to identify the participant to the communications application.
- 9. A method of configuring computer-based communication, said method comprising obtaining availability information indicating the availability of a user of the computer for communication using each of multiple communications applications.
- 10. The method as recited in claim 9, further comprising displaying the availability information on a display screen of the computer.
- 11. The method as recited in claim 9, further comprising sending the availability information to an additional computer.
- 12. The method as recited in claim 9, further comprising obtaining respective user identifiers effective to identify the user to each of the multiple communications applications.

13. A system for computer-based communication, said system comprising:

a display screen;

means for determining the availability of a potential participant in a computer-based communications session; and

means for, according to the determined availability, displaying information on the display screen.

- 14. The system as recited in claim 13, wherein said means for determining and means for displaying comprise a communications aggregation program stored on a storage medium within the system.
- 15. The system as recited in claim 14, wherein the display screen and storage medium are associated with the same computer system.
- 16. The system as recited in claim 14, wherein the communications aggregation program is adapted to access a data structure including participant availability information.
- 17. The system as recited in claim 14, wherein the data structure and communications aggregation program are stored on different storage media associated with different computer systems.
- 18. The system as recited in claim 13, further comprising:
 - means for receiving, from an initiator of the session, notification of a desired communications application to be used for the communications session; and



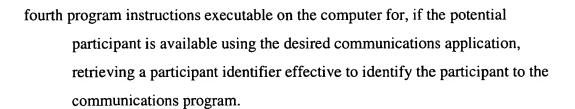
means for, if the potential participant is available using the desired communications application, retrieving a participant identifier effective to identify the participant to the communications application.

19. A computer-usable carrier medium, comprising:

first program instructions executable on a computer for determining the availability of a potential participant in a computer-based communications session; and

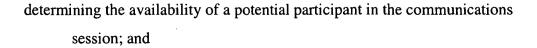
second program instructions executable on the computer for, according to the determined availability, displaying information on a display screen of an initiating computer used by an initiator of the communications session.

- 20. The carrier medium as recited in claim 19, wherein the first and second program instructions are within a communications aggregation program stored on the carrier medium.
- 21. The carrier medium as recited in claim 19, wherein the initiating computer is the same computer on which the program instructions are executable.
- 22. The carrier medium as recited in claim 19, further comprising:
 - third program instructions executable on the computer for receiving from the initiator of the communication notification of a desired communications application to be used; and



- 23. A computer-usable carrier medium, comprising a data structure storing information indicating availability, with respect to each of multiple communications applications, of a potential participant in a computer-based communications session.
- 24. The carrier medium as recited in claim 23, wherein the data structure further stores the information indicating availability for each of multiple potential participants.
- 25. The carrier medium as recited in claim 23, wherein the data structure further stores a set of participant identifiers effective to identify the potential participant to each of the multiple communications applications.
- 26. The carrier medium as recited in claim 25, wherein the set of participant identifiers and the availability information for each participant are within an object in an object-based programming approach.
- 27. The carrier medium as recited in claim 23, wherein the potential participant is a user of a computer within which the carrier medium is located.
- 28. A method of establishing a computer-based communications session involving a user of a computer, said method comprising:

receiving from the user notification of a desired communications application to the used for the communications session;



if the potential participant is available using the desired communications application, retrieving a participant identifier effective to identify the participant to the communications application.

- 29. The method as recited in claim 28, wherein said determining comprises retrieving availability information for the participant from a data structure.
- 30. The method as recited in claim 28, further comprising, according to the determined availability, displaying information on the display screen of the computer.
- 31. The method as recited in claim 30, wherein said displaying comprises displaying, for a given participant, availability for each of multiple communications applications.
- 32. The method as recited in claim 30, wherein said displaying comprises displaying, for a given communications application, a list of participants available for a communications session using the communications application.